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Cultivation of Didacticism in the Arabic Literary Tradition of Nigerian Provenance

تداخل التعليم في الأدب العربي من نيجيري

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Abstract: *The Arabic literati of Nigerian provenance have made significant contributions to literary activities in the country. Thematically, the Arabic verses of the literati are compossed for divergent purposes. A perusal of the genres of these verses shows didacticism as the most cultivated theme. The paper examined the literary compositions amongst the Arabic literati with attention paid to their didactic writings, using one of them, Sheikh Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale as a model. The paper revealed the propensity of the Nigerian Arabic poets for the cultivation of didacticism with their works on religious teachings, historical exposition, and morality and language studies. Their didactic contributions are predominantly in verses. The study employed both historical and contextual methods, in assessing the intellectual background of the composer and the social and cultural contexts that spurred the development of the cultivation of this genre by the Arabic poets in Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting 'Al-Hiwār, as specimen of their didactic verses. Content analysis method was employyed in examining the theme of the poem, with attention paid to the significance of the educational issues it captured. To achieve this, the original text of the Qasīdah was translated to English with concise thematic analysis. Apart from being a compass to researchers in Nigerian literary scholarship, the study provides information about the creativity of Nigerian Arabic literati, especially the verse-makers. Information obtained from the work could be a veritable tool in the efforts to unravel the significance of the literary contributions of the Arabic scholars to literary development in Nigeria.*

Keywords:*'Al-Hiwār,* Arabic, Didacticism, *Qasīdah, 'Ulamā'*

الملخص: قدّم الأدباء العرب من الأصول النيجيريّة مساهمات كبيرة في الأنشطة الأدبية في نيجيريا. ومن الناحية الموضوعية مثلا، فقد صنفت ابداعات الأدباء العربية لأغراض مختلفة. فالاطلاع على هذه الأنواع إن دلّ على شيئ، إنما يدلّ على أن التعليم هو الموضوع الأكثر اهتماما وتركيزا لتلك الأعمال والابداعات. وقد اعتنت هذه الدراسة بمؤلفات الأدباء العرب الأدبية مع الاهتمام والتركيز بكتاباتهم التعليمية مستعينة بكتابات الشيخ مصطفى جمعة أديوالي أنموذجاً. وقد قامت هذه الدراسة بتسليط الضوء على إظهار الشعراء العرب النيجيريين إلى حيز الوجود عن طريق تنمية التعليم من خلال أعمالهم المتمثلة في التعاليم الدينية، والأعراض التاريخية، والأخلاق، والدراسات اللغوية، وكانت مساهماتهم التعليمية تُكمن في تلك

الجمل والابداعات الجميلة في غالب الأحيان. ولقد اتبعت هذه الدراسة المناهج التاريخية والسياقية في تقييم الخلفيات الفكرية للمؤلف، والسياقات الاجتماعية، والثقافية التي حفزت في تطوير إنماء هذا النوع من قبل الشعراء العرب في نيجيريا. وقد تمّ استخدام أخذ العينات لهذه الأساليب الهادفة في اختيار الحوار كعّينة من أبياتهم التعليمية. وقد تمّ استخدام منهج تحليل في فحص موضوع القصيدة مع الإشارة إلى أهمّية القضايا التربويّة التي تناولتها. ولتحقيق ذلك المبتغى، فقد تمت ترجمة النص الأصليّ للقصيدة إلى اللغة الإنجليزية مع تحليل موضوعيّ موجز قصير لها. وإلى جانب ذلك فأن هذه الدراسة ستكون بمثابة بوصلة للباحثين في المجالات الأدبية النيجيرية، أملا أن تقدم هذه الدراسة معلومات حول إبداعات الأدباء العرب النيجيريين وخاصة الشعراء منهم. وكما يمكن أن تكون المعلومات التي تم الحصول عليها من خلال هذه الدراسة، أداة حقيقية في إبراز الجهود المبذولة للكشف عن أهمية المساهمات الأدبية للعلماء العرب في مسير التطور الأدبيّ الطويل في نيجيريا.

كلمات دلالية: الحوار، العربية، التعليم، القصيدة، العلماء

1. Introduction

The common themes of the Arabic literary compositions amongst the Nigerian Arabic literati have been identified as the lyrical (*'Al-Ghinā'ī*), the didactic (*'Al-Ta'līmī*) and the epistolography (*'Al -Murasalah*) (Bidmus, 1972:97). The focus of didacticism in Arabic literature, as observed by Folorunsho (2018:42), is the provision of instruction on religious teachings and language studies. Didactic compositions can be categorised into two; the first category consists of compositions that are in verses while the second category is known as 'Al-Nazm `Al-Manthūr -versification of prose writings. The motive of the Arabic literati in these arts, as noted by Abdul-Rahmon (1989: 229) is to teach morals in form of Wa'z (exhortation) and Hikmah (gnomic) or to teach certain principles of Islam or Arabic language in a mode more appealing to sentiment. Didacticism and lyricism occupy the widest space in the literary compositions amongst the Nigerian Arabic literati. A perusal of the magnitude of their contributions to each of the two genres shows that didactic writings consume the lion share. While trying to justify the magnitude of the contributions of the Arabic literati to didactic poetry in Nigeria, Kobi – Bauchi (2001) observes that:

If we put all the poetic compositions of the Nigerian 'Ulamā' together we will realize that the didactic poetry consumes the lion share, as the 'Ulamā' compose on all academic disciplines.

As we have noted elsewhere (Folorunsho, 2018:42), the submission above establishes the propensity of Nigerian Arabic poets for the cultivation of didacticism. While attempting to confirm and justify the magnitude of this genre within the anthologies of the Arabic poetry in Nigeria, Hunwick (1997) submits that:

> *The Islamic teaching tradition is a strong one in Nigeria and the need for texts for students was always great. Importing manuscripts copies from North Africa or Egypt was expensive…Evidently responding to local needs, teachers then made summaries of certain of these imported texts;…they also versified some of them using the didactic metre (`al-Rajaz) to facilitate rote learning. These versifications were sometimes amplified in commentaries by later generations (217).*

Encycopedia Britannica (2012), states that the word 'didactic' is from the Greek didaktikós, "apt at teaching". A didactic literary piece is intended to convey instruction and information. It states further that the word 'didactic' is often used to refer to texts that are overburdened with instructive or factual matter to the exclusion of graceful and pleasing detail so that they are pompously dull and erudite. Some literature, however, is both entertaining and consciously didactic, as, for example, proverbs and gnomic poetry (Encycopedia Britannica, 2012).

Didacticism connotes instructiveness in a literary work; one of the purposes appears to be the provision of guidance, particularly in moral, ethical or religious matters (Human, 1972:219). From this definition, it can be deduced that a didactic writing is such a literary piece that is aimed at imparting or teaching a lesson. We can safely submit, therefore, that the Arabic writings consisting of purely religious and pietistic themes, such as Wa'z (exhortation), Hikmah (gnomic), Tarikh (historical exposition), and Ta'lim (instructions on aspects of Islam or Arabic language) are didactic as they are basically intended to put one teaching or the other across to the readers. 'Al-Hiwār, our case study in this paper is a sample of didactic compositions of the Nigerian Arabic literati.

Of the erudite and prolific scholars who rose to great heights by dint of learning and hardwork is Sheikh Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale a Yoruba scholar of Arabic whose contributions to Arabic belles-lettres could not be underestimated. The literary works of this budding Arabic scholar had earlier received our attention (Folorunsho, 2013:97-100; 2020:49-54). This paper provides an anecdote on this erudite poet as a background to this study. Text, translation as well as thematic observation on the selected poem will be presented to facilitate an insight into the usage of Arabic verses as catalysts for didacticism by the Arabic poets of Nigerian extraction.

2. Methods

The study employed both historical and contextual methods, in assessing the intellectual background of the composer and the social and cultural contexts that spurred the development of the cultivation of this genre by the Arabic poets of Nigerian provenance. Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting *'Al-Hiwār*, as specimen of their didactic verses. Content analysis method was employed in examining the theme of the poem, with attention paid to the

significance of the educational issues it discussed. The study derived information primarily from consultation of relevant literature and engagement with the stakeholders. This method is adopted because of its reliance on extant sound submissions, which served as background to our analyses in this paper. The method is not empirical, it requires no instruments for data collection and it is not such that is verifiable by means of scientific experimentation. For the reliability and validity of the sources, we ensured the authenticity of every literature consulted.

3. Results and Discussion

Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale– An Anecdote

Folorunsho (2003:77) observes that Arabic scholars of Nigerian provenance could be classified into various categories; of them are teachers who ensure continuity of Islamic education, *Imams* for *Ratibi* and *Jumu'ah* mosques, preachers, calligraphers, *sūfī* leaders and writers. Falling into the category of those who actively subscribed to Arabic writing is the scholar whose literary piece is being selected for study in this paper.

Sheikh Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale, a budding Yoruba scholar of Arabic was born in 1954. His father, Alfa Jumu'ah Adewale was not an Arabic scholar but he showed much interest in Arabic scholarship. The early life of Shaikh Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale was therefore completely dedicated to the learning of Arabic and Islamic education unlike what was obtainable during that time whereby youths were always encouraged to take active part in farming or learning one type of vocation or the other. The determination of his parents to give him proper and sound Arabic education was due to his father's vow that if he was blessed with a male child, the child would be dedicated to the learning of Arabic and Islamic education (Lawal, 2014:45).

He joined *Rawdah 'Al-Dirāsāt 'Al-'Islāmiyyah wa'l-'Arabiyyah* founded by Shaykh Yūnus 'Al-Sunūsī in Ikirun, Osun State of Nigeria in 1968. He obtained his *Thānawi* (secondary) certificate in Arabic from *Rawdah* in 1976 and travelled to Egypt where he joined the Egyptian Institute for Foreign students. He was at this Institute between 1977 and 1979. He secured admission into the famous Al-Azhar University in Cairo to study English Literature and Education in 1980. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Education (B.A. Ed.) in 1983 and returned to Nigeria that same year (Adewale, 2000).

Of the Yoruba Arabic literati who have composed verses on diverse issues through the medium of Arabic language was Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale. It is noteworthy that Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale actually distinguished himself as a rare breed through his well-constructed literary productions. *'Al-Hiwār* is one of the literary productions of this scholar. Thematic observation on this poem will be made to facilitate an assessment of the contributions of this Shaykh to contemporary discussions on educational issues in Nigeria. He developed

interest in Arabic poetry right from his tender age. He is a prolific writer with a very deep knowledge of Arabic. In spite of the fact that this scholar studied and graduated from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt with a very good grade in English Literature/Education, he has really made significant contributions to Arabic literary productions in Nigeria

***'Al-Hiwār*: Introduction, Text and Translation**

Abubakar (2017:127) observes that different societies all over the world have their indigenous ways of socializing even before the system of formal education. Thus, there are specific methods of inculcating moral behavior which suits a society's traditional code of conduct. Of such methods adopted by the Nigerian '*Ulamā*' (Arabic/Islamic scholars) is the composition of didactic verses. Abdul-Rahmon (1989:228) describes didactic verses and versification as the verses composed to instruct. According to him, the term 'didactic' is used commonly for poetry, which teaches morals. Preminger (1974:190) also submits that didactic poetry can also refer to poetry which conveys information like astronomy, mathematics or rhetoric or systematic philosophy.

Abrams and Harpham (2009) expand the scope of didacticism to all writings that are instructive, either in prose or in verses. According to them:

The adjective 'didactic' which means 'intended to give instruction' is applied to works of literature that are designed to expound a branch of knowledge, or else to embody, in imaginative or fictional form, a moral, religious or philosophical doctrine or theme (79).

It is noteworthy that the composition of didactic poetry started right from the pre-Islamic days in Arabia, as noted by 'Al-Fakhūrī (1954:359), a literary historian who confirms that the Arabs were not ignorant of didactic poetry right from the *Jāhiliyyah* (pre-Islamic) era. In Nigeria, production of didactic writings began in the 17th century in Hausaland. Of the surviving works of that century is *Majzarat 'al-fityān,* a didactic poem consisting forty-eight lines based on the *Rajaz* metre of the Arabic prosody .The poem was composed by the celebrated Muhammad 'Al-Kashnāwī best known by his sobriquet, Ibn 'Al-Sabbāgh (Ahmed 1989; 59).Cultivation of this genre could not be ascribed exclusively to the Arabic writers of Northern Nigeria extraction as Abubakre (2004:317) observes the participation of Yoruba *`Ulamā'* in the cultivation of this genre which was pioneered by 'Ahmad b. 'Abūbakri, Omo-Ikokoro of Ilorin, with his *'Iltiqāt 'al-mutūn min khamsat funūn*

Didacticism as a genre in Arabic poetics of Nigerian authorship has earlier been discussed by Folorunsho (2011:64-70 & 2018:40-51). To avoid unnecessary overlapping, we may be constrained to limit our focus to *'Al-Hiwār*, the main subject of this paper. *'Al-Hiwār* (Dialogue) is a didactic poem of 18 lines composed by Mustafa Jumu'ah Adewale to enumerate the benefits derivable from seeking, and acquiring knowledge. *'Al-Hiwār,* the title of the poem could be

translated as talk, conversation, dialogue, argument, dispute and scenario of a motion picture (Cowan, 1960). It features intellectual engagement between two characters; an indigent and an indolent, respectively. The poem shows the creativity of some of the Nigerian Arabic writers.

The content of the poem justifies the selection of the title as it features a dialogue between an indolent person and a diligent one, each trying to justify his status. It also shows the creativity of some of the Arabic writers in Ikirun, South-western Nigeria. It is one of the literary productions of the era of efflorescence in Arabic literary productions in the town6. It is one of the thirty *Qasā'id* contained in the *Dīwān* (anthology) of the author entitled *Buhayrat 'Al-'anāshīd*. The collection was published in 1996. The following is the text of the poem, followed by its translation and thematic observation.

الحـوارلمصطفى جمعة أديوالي

كسول :

فما لك في الدرس فقت السّوّى # تعبّ العلوم على المستـوى

مجتهد :

فمالك للعلم تجهله # فلا المعلم ـمن بغير السوى

كسول :

لياليك سهر ولا ينقـضى # نهارك درس إلى المنتـهى

مجتهد :

دروس الليالي وحال الضحى # ركوب المجد لنيل العـلا

كسول :

ففي طول سهر كما خلته # إحالة جسم لداء الضّنـا

مجتهد :

ففي طول نوم كما ذقتـه # إحالة قلب لداء العـمى

كسول :

مضى عصر حوز لفيض العلو # م من حـاز بعضا هـواه الغنى

مجتهد :

مضى عصر جمع لبعض العلو # م من حاز نصفا عداه المنى

كسول :

و فى ظل رزق ترى كل من # حوى بعض علم عزير الجنى

مجتهد :

لمن نال فيضا فيوضات مـا # ينال الوسيط ومن قد حـذا

كسول :

أرى لك قلبا له المنتهى # من الحبّ للعلم لا يزدري

مجتهد :

ودادي للعلم مصدره # تعاليم ما فيه كلّ الشفا

كتاب الأحادي وسفر الملا # له الفضل دوما لضبط الهدى

وفي معظم الآي قد حبذاً # طلابك للعلم في المبتدى

ألا ليس سيّا مقام الذي # حوى فيض علم ومن قد زوى

كما ليس عدلا صفات الدجا # لوصف النهار لأولى الحجا

فجدّ من البدء للمنتهى # أرى المدح حكرا لمن قد وعى

كسول :

فسمعا وطاعا أيا صاحبي # لك الحمد منّي وطول الثنا

Translation of Dialogue

The Indolent: What is in knowledge that can place you above your compatriots? You keep acquiring knowledge yet nothing to show (for it).

The Diligent: Why is it that you are ignorant in knowledge, no knowledge can be gauged without a compatriot.

The Indolent: You keep your nights in endless vigils, spending your days in learning till your last day.

The Diligent: Studying at nights and the forenoon are vehicles of the diligent towards greatness.

The Indolent: In the prolonged sleeplessness in my view is the exposure of body to feebleness.

The Diligent: In prolonged sleeping according to my experience is the exposure of heart to blindness.

The Indolent: The era of acquiring extensive knowledge is gone; whoever acquires little makes wealth (acquisition) his passion.

The Diligent: The era of acquiring little knowledge is gone; a half-baked one will never achieve his aims.

The Indolent: In abundance of wealth, you see the one with little knowledge harvesting in multitude.

The Diligent: For the erudite one is an abundance of wealth, which an the mediocre and anyone on his footstep cannot achieve

The Indolent: I observe your life approaching an end, still seeking for knowledge, accepting no contrary views (to knowledge seeking).

The Diligent: My love for learning is derived from my ambition to acquire the science of all forms of healing.

(Studying the) literary productions of individuals and groups is a regular step to obtain guidance.
In a good number of (Qur`ānic) verses, learning form cradle is considered desirable.
Listen, the learned and the mediocre cannot attain the same level of dignity.
Just as the attributes of the night and day cannot be equated by an intelligent one.
Strive to learn from cradle till grave, I know, the learned one will eventually be praiseworthy.

The Indolent: My friend, I have heard your point and I am ready to comply, accept my gratitude and abundance of praise.

A Concise Thematic Analysis of *'Al-Hiwār*

'Al-Hiwār is a didactic poem of Nigerian provenance. It is a poem with no formal opening technically known as *Nasīb*. *Nasīb*, is technically known as an amatory preamble, which served as the prologue in the poetry of the classical Arab-Islamic period. *Nasīb* is defined by Badawi (1975:3) as the traditional amatory preamble, and elegiac reminiscence of love in which the poet expresses his gloomy and nostalgic meditation over the ruins of the deserted encampment of the beloved. This style later found patronage amongst later poets during the succeeding epochs of Arab-Islamic history. Consequent upon the influence of lslam, the use to which poets put this type of opening later changed. It became dedicated to stimulating the interest of their audience with a more logical opening rather than invitation to mourning for the relics and traces of the beloved one's habitation which characterised the prologues of the literary productions of the pre-Islamic era. Abdul-Rahmon (1989:15) observes that the traditional Arabic writers of Nigerian extraction also substitute the traditional *Nasīb* for doxology with a view to erasing the un-Islamic elements in the classical preamble. Excluding the prologue is clearly a departure from the common style of opening of the Arabic literary works with religious doxologies as prevalent in Nigeria. It is remarkable that Islamic traditional doxology and linguistic embellishment are parts of the components of the *Nasīb* in the Arabic works of Nigerian authorship.

It features conversation or arguments between two individuals on the necessity of knowledge acquisition. The two protagonists in the poem express conflicting views on the need for knowledge acquisition. While the diligent one argues in favour of seeking for knowledge pointing to its benefits, the indolent one sees nothing good in seeking and acquiring knowledge. At the end, the diligent was able to convince his opponent who, having realized his folly thanked the diligent and promised compliance with his observations.

In line 1, the indolent opens the discussion by asking what the diligent has to gain from knowledge acquisition that could enhance his status. He laments the wretchedness, which consumes the diligent in spite of the knowledge he possesses. The diligent responds on line 2 asking why the indolent decides to remain ignorant. He goes further to note that the sweet 'taste' of knowledge can be perceived by the learned and such cannot be felt by a stark illiterate.

The indolent, still displaying his ignorance, queries what the diligent stands to gain from endless vigils while he also keeps daytimes alive studying, seeking further knowledge (line 3). In response, the diligent enlightens him that knowledge acquisition, day and night, are comparable to the vehicles, which convey the riders to greatness (line 4). This response is in conformity with the submission of `Al-Zarnūjī(n.d), in his famous didactic treatise entitled *Taʻlīm 'al-mutaʻallim tarīq 'al-taʻallum* on the justification of seeking for knowledge. Unsatisfied with the response of the diligent, the indolent argues that keeping many vigils causes the ailment of feebleness (line 5). The diligent in the succeeding line responds (line 6) that prolonged sleeping stimulates the conveyance of heart to blindness.

Between lines 7 and 10, the indolent blindly argues that man needs not to acquire erudition, as little knowledge is enough to attract wealth. He argues further that the richest of the people are the half-backed ones, enjoying in abundance of wealth. This argument tallies with the current thoughts in our society nowadays, where youths are no longer ready to get educated and work hard but prefer to engage in dubious means to get wealthy. It is, therefore, not surprising that cases of ritualism, armed robbery, kidnapping and engagement in fraudulent practices through the internet are currently rampant. Trying to prove him wrong, the diligent submits that achievement of one's aim is impossible without knowledge and that the wealth achievable by a learned man can't be equated with the one achievable by the ignorant and fraudulent ones.

When it became obvious that the diligent was not prepared to be blindfolded by the (indolent's) wrong arguments, the indolent (in line 11) expresses his sympathy for the diligent whose life approaches its end, still on the task of seeking for knowledge. The diligent uses lines 12 - 17 to educate the indolent further. Here, he states what stimulates him into learning - being the ambition to acquire the skills of all forms of healing. To achieve the aim, he expresses the necessity of wider consultation with learned ones. He cites an instance from the Qur`ān where learning from cradle is considered desirable. He enlightens the indolent that the same level of greatness and dignity can't be attained by the learned and an ignorant one, just as day and night cannot be compared. He encourages the indolent to learn till death comes as the knowledgeable ones achieve praises even after their death. Convinced by these well presented points, the indolent realizes his foolishness and submits: "my

friend, I have heard your points, I am ready to learn, accept my gratitude and praise" (line 18)!

As a style commonly employed in the epilogues of either the prose or verse writings of Nigerian authorship, Abdul-Rahmon (1995:325) notes that doxology take a significant portion of their closings. The poems are closed with not only the doxology but also the number of lines in the composition as well as the poetic metre adopted, probably, because the Qur'ān specially enjoins believers to seek blessings for the Prophet of God and to offer thanks to Allah. Excluding the epilogue, just like the prologue, is clearly another departure from the common style of closing of the Arabic literary works with religious doxologies as prevalent in Nigeria

'Al-Hīwar is a poem which reveals values of learning as means towards the illumination of the mind and attainment of greatness. It shows the creativity of Shaykh Mustafa by adopting an approach similar to *Al-jidd wa-l-hazl* (seriousness and jesting) works of the classical Arabic (Gelder, 1991:199-211). It is an uncommon style in the Arabic works of West African provenance. *'Al-Hīwar* is not an academic exercise in futility but a poem which exposes the value of learning as a means towards the illumination of mind and attainment of greatness. It shows the creativity of Shaikh Mustafa by adopting an uncommon style in the Arabic works of West African provenance, in composing the poem.

4. Conclusions

The Arabic poets of Nigerian provenance have made significant contributions to the various genres of Arabic poetry. Of their mostly cultivated genres, didacticism occupies a pride of place. Their didactic verses embrace diverse issues-religious and secular. 'Al-Hiwār, a didactic poem composed by Shaykh Mustafa Adewale to enumerate the benefits derivable from knowledge acquisition received our attention in this paper. This composer, a budding Arabist, has made significant contributions to other genres of Arabic literature, in addition to didacticism.

His works are not only in verses but also in prose. 'Al-Hiwār reveals the depth of erudition of this scholar and his mastery of Arabic language in spite of the fact that he specializes in English literature. The poem was also studied to show that contrary to the proclivity of Nigerian 'Ulamā' for religiosity which forms a core aspect of their prologues and epilogues, there are still some of their writings that actually deviate from this style. An instance of such writings is the didactic poem presented in this paper

Literary critics and researchers need to give more attention to Yorubaland of Nigeria as Arabic scholars therein have not been duly recognized. This study has endeavored to serve as an eye-opener for future researchers to the vast literary legacies and giants existing in Yorubaland, South-western Nigeria. Apart from the didactic ode of Shaikh Mustafa studied in this paper, this scholar has tangible

contributions to other genres of the Arabic literature. His works are not only in verse but also in prose. The poem studied reveals the depth of erudition of this scholar and his mastery of Arabic language.

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